



Concept of Sustainable World in Literature: Truth and Philosophy of some Bengali Laureate Dr. Nandita Roy

Associate Prof, Dept. of Bengali, Government Degree College, Dharmanagar, North Tripura, India

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Abstract

Sustainable Development is not just about science and technology, on a broader sense, it incorporates various facets such as socio- economic, cultural and moreover to develop a universal consciousness which will eradicate Gender inequalities, and will set up some ethical principles which will ensure a collective development of both men and environment as both are complimentary to each other.

Hence. science and technology can not only induce all around development, the responsibility should be borne by everyone from every sphere of life such as science, literature, academics, intellectuals, economist and even those who are engaged in social services. Only collective effort will pace up the growth which will be the parameter for building up a welfare nation.

The admirers of literature do not only take literature just as a pleasure giving medium but on a broader sense, literature is always the reflection of the society. Person's biological, sensual crisis and all kind of environmental degradation, from the literary canon, are ought to rise a wave which always tries to mitigate people's sufferings and to transform the world into a more favourable place for the upcoming generation, the thought process of a laureate must always be proactive so that the popular saying "Pen is mightier than the sword" will be more justified.

For setting up a more comprehensive and efficient world, there is hardly scarcity in the effort from the literary world. This study will cover up the truths and philosophy of some Bengali pioneer writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Kaji Nazrul Islam, Jibanananda Das whose writings targeted to build up a greater and sustainable world.

Key words: Sustainable Development, Education, Gender Equality, Communal Harmony, Cooperative Policy

Introduction:

Environment and Literature have always coexisted from time immemorial. In the vast canvas of Bengali literature, we have seen from Tagore to Jibanananda that their works aren't just a manifestation of their literary insight but also have the undercurrent for the conservation of Nature and biodiversity. They didn't only confine their pen to the work of spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions but at the same time, wrote lines for gender equality, child's psychological development that matter for the entire humanity's sustainable development. Tagore's vision for an ideal world where nature and humans will share a relationship based on partnerships rather than domination by humans. As one truly said Bengal has been the cradle for the evolution of Literature in India and it has

never only been pouring emotions and imagination rather to create a collective consciousness through writing among people regarding the need to work towards achieving the goal of sustainable development.

In the pursuit of building a stable world, Bengali writers have always played the role of guiding lights. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), throughout his long eighty-years of life, repeatedly conveyed messages of human welfare through his diverse creative expressions. In this discussion, the thoughts and views of some writers, philosophers on sustainable world will be showcased, but the light of kabiguru's ideas will shine a bit more prominently.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), a cyclonic monk, who in the 19th century elevated India to a new level of esteem on the world map, did not view religion as a communal ideology. For him, religion represented values, ideals, patriotism, and humanity. Through the practice of religion, he redefined the concept of sustainable development in a multidimensional way. His thoughts and philosophy will be explored in this writing.

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1975), who can be considered a contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore or even his successor to some extent, repeatedly conveyed messages of communal harmony through his writings. He spoke of gender equality in society, emphasizing equal dignity for both men and women – which he saw as a fundamental prerequisite for establishing welfare and holistic development in the world.

Jibanananda Das (1899–1954), who brought a new dimension of modernism to Bengali literature, portrayed in his poetry that the advancement of urban civilization can never truly lead the world toward progress. Instead, nature, villages, forests, and green woodlands—the true companions of humanity—hold the key. It is our harmony with them that can shower the world with peace and well-being, and this, he suggests, is the inevitable destiny.

Role of Rabindranath and Jibanananda in environmental conservation:

Among the thinkers, researchers, scientists, economists, and writers who have continuously strived to bring about sustainable development, Rabindranath Tagore is one of the leaders, who were a world-renowned writer, philosopher, philanthropist, and social visionary.

Rabindranath Tagore is not just a romantic poet, he is a far-fetched visionary of his times, a futurist, and a progressive writer, whose literary ideas still ring relevance today. Therefore, his pen recurred the many crises of human life and the ways to evade from them.

Rabindranath was extremely inquisitive about the source of life, the constant flow of life in the cosmos. The omnipotent, through his mercy, has created a green, tranquil, and serene world for mankind and other living beings, the world which is an incredibly drawn with astounding landscapes like vast forests, mountains, seas, and plains.

But people are constantly exploiting this natural resource. In order to meet their own greedy ends, they are indiscriminately destroying the forests and water resources. The balance of nature is being impaired.

Rabindranath Tagore realized many years ago that this indiscriminate cutting of trees could one day be a threat to the lives of all creatures. Today, scientists around the world are worried and terrified about global warming. The topic of sustainable development keeps coming up again and again. Envisioning about a sustainable world, Tagore has preached the message of human welfare in his countless literary creations. By giving the

tree, the place of a God, he indirectly wants to send the message to humanity that we will soon have to pay a big price for our thoughtless actions and if very soon we do not realise our ethical duties towards nature and take up responsibility for protecting the supremely kind forest, otherwise the destruction of creation is inevitable and will be catastrophic.

In his article 'Aranyodevata' of 'Polliprakriti' he wrote that God created the essence of life, and arranged it around all the lives -- man, through his lust for materialistic possession, has provided the means of death. Humans have nullified the very plants that purify the air, whose leaves fall and fertilize the land. Whatever blessings of God bestows upon us, people are wasting them, forgetting their own welfare.

Another article of 'Polliprakriti' named 'Halkorshon' he shared his valuable views in a significant manner. and it was like that

*'Brikhoropon utsab hocche opobyeyee santan kortrik matribhandar puron koribar kolyan utsab'*⁹

It means:

The tree planting festival is a welfare festival for the prodigal child to replenish the mother's treasury. Therefore, in order to captivate and the attention of people, he has become vocal in worshipping trees, giving them the status of God --

*"Mrittikar he veer sontan,
Songram ghoshile tumi mrittikare dite
mukti dan morur darun durgo hote,
juddho chole fire fire."*⁷

It suggests:

*"O! brave son of the earth,
declare war, and give the earth its freedom from the great fortress of the
desert,
the war goes on and on."*

If we look closely, we will see that he gave the title of heroic child not to mankind, but to the forest.

His bowing at the end of the poem seems to be sending a message to the entire human race that the welfare and prosperity of the human race lies in the creation of forests, not in the destruction. He writes:

*"Tobo prane pranban,
tobo sneho chayay shitol, tobo teje tejiyan,
sojjito tomar malye je manob, tari dut hoye,
ogo manober bondhu aaji ei kabyo orghyo loye
shyamer banshir tane mugdho kobi ami,
orpilam tomay pronami."*⁷

It conveys:

*"You are alive in spirit,
Cool in the shade of your love,
Glorious in your radiance,
The human being adorned with your garland,
Becoming your messenger,
O friend of mankind! today, with this poetic offering,
I, a poet enchanted by the melody of Shyam's flute,
I offer my homage to you."*

Like Rabindranath Tagore, the poet Jibanananda Das also sought to judge nature in terms of its own uniqueness. The aggressive, imperialistic attitude of modern human civilization tormented the poet. The poet's poetry seems to repeatedly highlight this comment that War, bloodshed, and the seizure of power by the hands of machine monsters never bring about the overall well-being of humanity.

In giving priority to civic life and civilization, and living a luxurious life, people are inflicting unspeakable torture on nature, which is creating deep wounds in the balance of nature, and the poet also feels suppressed by this.

The poet writes:

*"Ei prithibir ron, rokto, sofolota
Satyo; tobu shesh satyo noy.
Kolkata ekdin kollolini tilottoma hobe,
Tobuo tomar kache amar hriday."*¹

It indicates:

"The war, the blood, the juggernaut of this world
are true, yet it's not the ultimate truth.
Kolkata will one day wear the golden crown;
Still, my heart accompanies you"

This word "you" is of great significance here, it is our understanding, our consciousness, by nurturing that consciousness, the path to overall peace, solidarity, and reconciliation will one day be paved in the world.

The poet's heartfelt conviction is revealed in the lines of the poem:

*"Suchetana, ei pothe alo jwele -
Epothei prithibir krommukti hobe;
.....
Amader moto klanto- klantiheen nabiker hate
Gore debo, aaj noy, dher dur antim probhate."*¹

That is:

"O Consciousness, light this path -
This is the path that will free the world;"

.....
We will build it in the hands of tired - tireless sailors like us,
not today, but in the distant final dawn"

To reap the benefits of long-term progress and development of the society and mankind, we have no alternative choice but to respect and follow the poet's thoughts.

Cooperative production and thoughts of Rabindranath:

Not only the great economists are showing the way on how to bring rural life and the overall development of the country, especially in the financial sector, to the common people, but we also see the idea of economic development reflected in Rabindranath's literature.

The cooperative policy that showed the direction of development for India's rural economy, Rabindranath Tagore, many years before of independence, realized the importance of cooperatives and presented his views and thoughts about the cooperative policy in his "Samobay neeti" to his esteemed readers.

He writes in the article 'Samabaya 2' of the book 'Samabaya Neeti' -

"The greatest virtue of human being is that they tend to live together. A lonely man cannot be completed within himself. Those who live in collective environment are called perfect man. Lonely man is just a fragment."

According to him, true civilization is where the strength of each individual empowers all of humanity. Therefore, if one bears responsibility alone, the development of the country is not possible. Since the true essence of the motherland or the nation beats in the villages—where life truly pulses—development must proceed hand in hand with the village. The advancement of urban civilization alone cannot bring about the complete development of a nation."

Indian states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana have achieved remarkable progress in agriculture today—primarily by embracing mechanical engineering and enhancing crop production through the aid of factories and machinery. Over a century ago, Rabindranath Tagore, with meticulous explanation, had already shown that the lives of poor village farmers could be transformed quite easily through the power of cooperative policy

He says that just as the hand once yielded to the plough, now the plough must yield to the machine. Progress is impossible without embracing the advancement of science

"But looking toward European civilization will not lead to the improvement of the poor in this country. Development is not possible by relying solely on nature's gifts. Excessive rain, drought, or lack of rainfall can disrupt crop production. If it rains during harvest time and there aren't enough labourers, all the crops might get ruined in the field. A farmer's fate can also be determined by nature. Therefore, we must utilize machinery for cultivation, harvesting, and transporting crops to storage."

But to take advantage of machinery, a large amount of land and money is required—which no single farmer can manage alone. Therefore, the main point is that everyone must come together and work collectively. A stick to one is easily breakable, but a bundle of sticks shows strength and resistance.

"If fifty farmers, who are cultivating their land separately, can pool their land, plows, and tools together, then the opportunity for large-scale capital investment will naturally arise.

Rabindranath Tagore simplified this idea with an example: if a farmer has only one liter of milk, he cannot start a business with it. But hundreds of farmers pull all their milk together and start a business, they can soon become profitable. A small country like Denmark has formed such cooperatives and tasted great success. By trading in milk products, they have overcome poverty. We too must follow this path.

"It is evident that whatever is valuable and noble in human achievement has been accomplished collectively. He says:

*"Bali jomite fosol bhalo hoy na, kenona, ta aant bandhe na, tai tate ras o jome na, fosol bhalo hoy na. manushero thik tai. tader modhye fank beshi hoilei tader shokti kaje lage na, thekeo na thakar moto hoy."*¹¹

'Crops do not grow well in sandy soil because it does not hold together; it cannot retain moisture, and so the yield is poor. The same is true for people—if there is too much distance or disunity among them, their strength becomes fragile, as if they do not exist at all.'"

In our country, Anand Milk Union Limited was established in the year of 1946 and in primary stage, it was known as Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers's Union Limited. Later it turns into a widely popular Brand Amul. Amul is owned and operated by 3.6 million milk producers in Gujrat, making the world's largest farmer - owned dairy co-operative. Amul played a key role in the white revolution in India contributing to the country's increased milk production and becoming the key player in dairy co-operative in Asia.

I brought up the example of Amul because it brought about a revolutionary transformation that accelerated the pace of long-term growth in India's economy and became a vital source of hope and support for small farmers.

Amul's success led to the development of the Anand pattern, an economic organisational model that empowers small producers, farmers, through collective action.

"About 16 years before Amul was established, Rabindranath had introduced us to the idea of collective action by publishing a booklet on the principles of cooperation at the first session of the Burdwan divisional conference in Sriniketan."

"Therefore, it can be assumed that Rabindranath, not only as a literary figure but also as an economic thinker, a visionary sage, took the initiative to unite people's productive power."

People will come together to find means of livelihood so that they may grow collectively – not just in wealth, but in education and generosity of spirit. And this is the very precondition of sustainable development. In today's time of crisis, the message of unity is highly relevant – something that Rabindranath conveyed to us through his creative works.

Sustainable Development through Communal Harmony

Rabindranath Tagore deeply realized in his heart that the despicable condition of the people of colonized India – their impoverishment, frailty, dependent outlook, and tendency to silently accept everything without protest – was a significant obstacle to the nation's progress and future upliftment.

The poet was deeply pained by the plight of Indians under British rule, especially when the same British, by harnessing the full benefits of machine power, were dominating the world. Tagore's writings were always attentive to the idea of sustainable development. The prosperity of Japan and Russia, achieved through the effective use of machinery, caught his attention.

He believed that embracing the blessings of mechanical power, along with the spread of proper education, could lead to national advancement. A nation divided by caste, racial discrimination, and religious stigmas cannot possibly develop or flourish.

During his visit to Russia, Tagore was mesmerized by the uniqueness of their system of governance. He did not perceive any conflict or rivalry between Hindus and Muslims for gaining political power. Instead, he saw a spiritual vicinity between the two communities, which he believed was the profound and intrinsic essence of good governance.

The writer had pointed out Harmonious relationship between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in this way:

*"Mosolman jatike sokoldike shoktiman kore toolbar jonyo tader adhyobosay nirontor.governmenter udyog konobhabei asammankor noy ebong tate monushyoter hani kore na."*¹⁰

"There is constant effort and perseverance to empower the Muslim community in all aspects. Government initiatives are in no way dishonorable, nor do they diminish human dignity."

Whatever power may be in governance, its purpose should be the development of humanity—and there are two nations in the world actively engaged in this pursuit of excellence.

However, the British, wherever they have ruled over other nations, have deceitfully drawn lines of division among them, leading the conquered generations to face repeated challenges.

The ordinary people of the subcontinent have fallen victim to this toxic division, and such ethnic fragmentation remains a major obstacle to the overall development of these countries.

1905, the poet deeply alarmed us about the Partition of Bengal and the heinous conspiracy behind it. That is why he wrote:

*"Banglar mati banglar jol
Banglar bayu, banglar fol,
Ek houk, ek houk, ek houk he bhogoban!"*⁶

It signifies that:

"The soil of Bengal, the water of Bengal,
The air of Bengal, the fruits of Bengal—
Let them be one, let them be one, let them be one, O Lord."

The anguish and fear the poet expressed in this poem clearly reflect his far-sightedness. Just seven years before India's independence, in his essay "Sobhyatar sonkot" from the book 'Kalantar', Rabindranath issued a dire warning. Infact, it is not division but unity and brotherhood that can bring about true and lasting welfare. "Although Hindus and Muslims have coexisted in the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years, they remain almost spiritually unfamiliar with one another. The two communities continue to engage in conflict, often fueled by religious discord, which deeply troubles the poet. In the article 'Samasya' from the book 'Kalantor', he writes:

*"Bharatborsher kolyan jodi chai tahole hindu mosolman kebol je militia hote hobe ta noy, samokokkho hote hobe. sei samokokkhota tal thoka paloyanir byektigoto samokokkhota noy, ubhoy pokkher samajik shoktir samokokkhota."*¹²

It suggests that

"If we truly wish for the welfare of India, then Hindus and Muslims must not only come together but also become equals. This equality is not the combative parity of two wrestlers challenging each other, but a social equality shared by both communities."

The poet does not attempt to resolve Hindu-Muslim conflict through superficial measures. Instead, he seeks to delve into its core and judge it with inner insight. Though his thoughts may not have been appreciated during his lifetime, we believe that future generations—or even our present time—will truly recognize his worth. Only through the establishment of harmony can the world be inspired by a humane spirit and move forward on the path of progress."^{**}

Kazi Nazrul Islam was also a staunch opponent of religious division.

His countless poems carry the message of humanity—

***"Hindu na ora muslim oi jigya se konjon
Kandari bolo dubiche manush sontan mor mar."***²

It conveys that:

"Are they: Hindus or Muslims – who asks such a question?
O helmsman, say it – it's a human drowning, the child of my mother "

Nazrul, a proponent of free thoughts, never judged people based on their community; he always sought to see them simply as human beings. In his poem Hindu-Mosolman, the message of humanity resonates, a message that was later echoed in songs as well:

***"Mora ekoi brinte duti kusum hindu mosalman,
Mulim tar noyoner moni, hindu tahar pran."***³

"We are two buds on the same stem – Hindu and Muslim.

The Muslim is the jewel of its eye, the Hindu is its heart's core."

Poets naturally speak of humanity, and in Nazrul's poetry, we hear the celebration of humankind. He wanted to remove the divisions among people and convey the message of equality. According to him, Religion is the manifestation of human beings and not the vice-versa. Therefore, no more bloodshed, no more divisions in the name of religion. In his poem 'Manush' (The Human), he declares:

***"Gahi samyer gan,
Manusher cheye boro kichu nai, nohe kichu mohiyan."***⁴

"I sing the song of equality –

There is nothing greater than man, nothing more noble."

To break the chains of subjugation, he called upon all Indians to fight as one united nation. Division weakens people; it does not teach them strength. If everyone nurtured the feeling that we are all children of Mother India, then the stream of national progress would flow unhindered, and the word like "community" would never become an obstacle.

Vivekananda, who is regarded as a pioneer of the Hindu renaissance and who elevated India to the highest peak of honor at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, never spoke of religion as a means of division. He believed that the core aim of all religions is the same – to realize the divine essence within oneself. According to him, true religion is that which transforms a being from animal to human, and from human to divine. He found the essence of truth in all religions and, based on that, sought to find unity among them. According to him, it is the clash and divergence of thoughts that give rise to new thinking. If we all remain confined to the same thought, we would have to live like Egyptian mummies in a museum. To generate movement, the collision of two or more forces is necessary. Therefore, diversity in religion is essential, and it is natural that different communities will emerge as a result.

In the essay titled " Vishwadharm upolobdir path" (The Path to the Realization of a Universal Religion,) he states that all the major religions of the world still exist today; they continue to spread and grow. If it were the will of the Creator that only one of these religions were true and all the others false, then only that one would have survived, and the rest would have disappeared. Since that hasn't happened, it means that there is value and essence in all of them."¹⁴

Since the Indian subcontinent is predominantly inhabited by followers of Hinduism and Islam, he sought the liberation of India by uniting the core principles of both religions. He stated that "India will one day rise with the body of Islam and the mind of Vedanta." His

words reflect the belief that every religion contains an essence of truth, and only by embracing the messages of goodwill with an open heart can the flow of sustainable development continue.

Sustainable Development through Gender Equality:

Rabindranath Tagore was a poet of universal humanity. His writings neither acknowledged male dominance as absolute, nor did they remain silent about the deprivation of women. He wanted men and women to coexist equally in society.

In many of his stories, novels, and poems, the rebellious spirit of women against the patriarchal system is powerfully expressed. In his dance-drama Chitrangada, the character Chitrangada proudly asserts her independent identity, affirming her self-worth:

*"Ami chitrangoda, ami rajendranondini,
Nohi devi, nohi samanya nari.
Puja kori more rakhibe urdhe se nohi nohi,
Hela kori more rakhibe piche se nohi nohi.
Jodi parshwe rakho more sonkote, sompode,
sammoti dao Jodi kothin brite sohay hote,
pabe tobe tumu chinite more."*⁸

It indicates that:

"I am Chitrangada, I am the daughter of a king.
I am not a goddess, nor an ordinary woman.
You will not worship me and place me above,
No – never.
You will not neglect me and place me behind,
No – never.
If you keep me by your side in hardship and in prosperity,
If you let me share your struggles,
Only then will you truly know me."

The day this self-identification and claim to rightful place expressed by Chitrangada carries equal meaning for all women, the world will become truly whole – a rightful home for all of humanity.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, in his poem "Nari" (Woman) from the collection Samyabadi (The Egalitarian), also wrote:

*"Bishwer ja kichu mohan sristi, chiro kolyankor,
Ordhek tar koriyache nari ordhek tar nor."*⁵

"Whatever great and noble creation exists in the world,
Half of it was made by woman, the other half by man."

The poet envisioned a world where men and women have equal rights to the beauty, taste, fragrance, and touch of life.

Role of Rabindranath in Sustainable Development of Education

Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts on education also played a crucial role in determining the direction of the country's overall progress. Both before and after India's independence, the government adopted various policies and measures to elevate the education system to a higher level. The National Education Policy of 1885, the Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948, the Mudaliar Commission of 1952–53, the Kothari Commission of 1964–66, the National Education Policy of 1986, and even the New Education Policy of 2020 – all were

formulated with the belief that they would bring about transformative changes in the field of education.

Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest educators and philosophers the world has ever known, also took far-reaching initiatives in the realm of education. He envisioned education as life-oriented and nature-friendly. To him, education meant freedom of the body, mind, and soul. He believed that the true development of a child's mind is possible only in close proximity to nature. The conventional, school-centered system of education did not appeal to him. In such systems, instead of nurturing human beings, schools produce factory-like products. The book-based education confined within brick-and-mortar school buildings does not allow a student's inner self to blossom properly.

That's why he placed greater value on the concept of Tapovan (forest-based spiritual learning). This idea is also reflected in his songs:

"In this sky, my freedom is in the light,

My freedom is in the dust, in the grass."

Driven by this aspiration for freedom, he established Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan — one of the world's most distinguished universities.

Simply carrying a bag full of books to school does not lead to true education. In most cases, children see this method of learning as a burden. That's why he remarked:

*"Amra shikshake bapon korilam na, amra bohon koriyai cholilam."*¹³

"We did not ride education as a vehicle; instead, we carried it as load."

According to Tagore, education must be an intimate part of daily life. It should flow in harmony, in unison with life itself — not be something confined within the cage called a classroom. But unfortunately, we have not been able to truly internalize Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy. Today's education emphasizes statistics, not values. As a result, the number of highly educated degree-holders is increasing in every household, but in most cases, they are becoming self-centered individuals. They are neither promising for society, nor responsible or dutiful towards their families or parents. We are nurturing a kind of emptiness and crisis within ourselves.

This is certainly not the kind of education Rabindranath envisioned. The policymakers and implementers of our country's education system must reconsider their approach. We need to move forward with Tagore's philosophy as our guide. The poet longed for an education that would make us liberal, that would help us grow into large-hearted and expansive individuals. We too must carry forward that very form of education which affirms the message of the Vishnu Purana:

"Sā vidyā yā vimuktaye" — "True knowledge is that which leads to inner freedom".

Conclusion:

To wind up the discussion, It has to be said that the children of the new fast moving era should recede back to the principles of great literary sage like that of great Veterans of literature realm Tagore, Najrul and lot to understand the value of balanced coexistence with nature. Its high time that we realize our ethical commitment towards nature and must stop this sacrilege and act upon like a responsible trustee for the future generation. In this regard we can take a leaf out of literature and could implement it for practical purposes. This way we can stop this torpedoing of nature and will be able to achieve the goal of sustainable development and make this world livelier and more peaceful. Tagore's holistic approach towards the balance between nature and human has always been a matter of

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great applause in the literary domain and we should also get along with it.... May the world be infused with this vision of harmony, compassion, and beauty as imagined by these great literary minds. We express our heartfelt wish that we can present a more enlightened and blossomed world to the next generation—this must be our firm commitment to every new-born child.

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